



INTRODUCTION

The Mycenaean Greek hero of Homer's *Odyssey* returned from the Trojan War around 1200 BC by boarding a Phoenician ship for the last part of his journey.¹ This was mentioned casually, since the comings and goings of Phoenician trading ships in those days was a natural part of life. The Greek Dark Age soon followed, and lasted several hundred years. Thucydides told us that when this dark curtain was finally lifted, the Greek people began to thrive again and expanded their reach to Sicily around 734 BC. Yet when their men arrived at that bountiful land they found Phoenician trading ships still coming and going, and Phoenician outposts established all around the island.²

This suggestion that other societies had remained active and went about their daily lives without experiencing a corresponding dark age was intriguing. In the eastern Mediterranean the Hebrew people described in detail how the Phoenicians of Tyre helped them build Solomon's Temple around 966 BC. The two societies prospered and built significant cities during this time.

If the Phoenicians had been inclined to write history, they could have helped illuminate the dark days of Greece. Unfortunately they were inclined in the opposite direction and kept their affairs unwaveringly private. This penchant for secrecy caused them to become, as historian Glenn Markoe noted, "the enigma that we call the Phoeni-

cians.”³ As we will see, this secretive nature served these people well over the years, allowing their small society to survive among the larger military societies that surrounded them. Yet this was also unfortunate in that the Phoenicians were the far-ranging sea traders who went from society to society carrying discoveries, inventions, techniques, customs and many material objects from one to the other. They were the go-betweens. More than anyone else of that day, they seemed to be immersed in the lives and affairs of people in the societies around them.

The Phoenicians wrote copiously, as acknowledged by many Greek and Roman writers.⁴ Yet their preference for secrecy did not allow them to share those writings outside their society. Almost no copies of Phoenician writings remain today. Other societies, however, wrote frequently about the Phoenicians. Bringing together those many bits and pieces has now begun to give us a much better picture of this unique society. Archaeologists round out that picture with rich details that have helped bring the Phoenicians to life to a remarkable degree. By following the Phoenicians in their active expansion across the length and breadth of the Mediterranean, we come to see the tapestry of history woven by their back-and-forth travels. This has helped illuminate as never before the many societies of the ancient Mediterranean. These include the Egyptians, Minoans, Mycenaeans, Hittites, Sea Peoples, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Hebrews, Africans, Iberians, Etruscans, classical Greeks, Romans and many smaller societies.

For more than two thousand years after the Phoenicians last walked the shores of Lebanon and sailed from its ports to the far ends of the Mediterranean Sea, these ancient people remained a mystery. Only recently have we been able to assemble a reasonably complete picture of their entire history.

How could that history have remained untold for so many years? The Phoenicians contributed greatly to the concealment of their society by raising no great monuments recording their achievements, and not allowing their written records to circulate. Their preference for secrecy was the first serious obstacle to their history being revealed.

Another was the normal suppression that occurred as conquerors swept across their country. Between conquests by Babylonians and Persians, Greeks and Romans, Arabs and Crusaders, Mamluks and Turks, clues to the early history of the Lebanese people were reduced to tatters.

Finally, as documented by Martin Bernal in *Black Athena*,⁵ there appeared to have been bias by some historians against the Phoenicians and Egyptians, which peaked in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries AD. Today, in the twenty-first century, we are endeavoring to do better.

To overcome those obstacles, the process of reassembling the history of the Phoenician people and their society has proceeded on two fronts. One was the traditional presentation of academic papers that I and others have produced, as well as the archaeological reports produced by experts in that field. These will necessarily continue for many years until the full range of this history has been explored with appropriate annotations and citations.

As a companion to that process, the current volume you now hold is the broad flow of this epic story painted in bold strokes. It is well known that there are often several opinions on what actually happened during each event in history, and in scholarly papers one is apt to identify those various opinions, with the pro and con of each, and then conclude with support for one opinion. Yet to cover three thousand years of history and hundreds of significant events in one volume using that approach would require perhaps two thousand pages, and that is too large a scope for the present work. Therefore, the approach used here is to simply present the explanation of each event that has been best supported by all available historical and archaeological data. This is a much more understandable rendition of the events that occurred, and is reasonable in scope. However, it is certainly not perfect. As new research and archaeological finds come to light, the weight of professional opinion may shift to a different explanation for an individual event. This would need to be absorbed in future papers or editions after such facts are discovered.

The old view of ancient Mediterranean history—once widely believed—was that a general dark age existed before the rise of classical Greece, causing there to be no earlier learning or civilization of note

other than the long-lost civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. A surprising number of people still hold that belief. The relatively new view that has emerged from the growing body of evidence produced by current scholars is that a greater degree of continuity existed from the early Egyptian-Mesopotamian days to the rise of the classical Greeks and Romans. Far from diminishing the spectacular Greek and Roman achievements, this view of continuity is somewhat like a substantial gold ring that holds a brilliant diamond. The ring does not diminish the glittering jewel, but rather serves to present the gem in its best setting and light.

If you try on this ring and like what it does for you, it is yours to keep.

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